

# Deborah Lipstadt and the Ruling Discourse on Holocaust Studies

[Bradley R. Smith](#)

With the renewed interest in Deborah Lipstadt due to the release of the film *Denial*, we have chosen to include this article by the late Bradley R. Smith. Smith comments extensively about Lipstadt's anti-revisionist book, *Denying the Holocaust* and especially the vitriol that Lipstadt unleashed on him for his work to introduce college students to revisionism. Smith included this article in *The Revisionist Campus Edition* in 2000. The article later served as Chapter One of his book, *Break His Bones: The Private Life of a Holocaust Revisionist*.

For ten years and more I suppose I have been the most visible Holocaust revisionist activist in America. I'm very far from being the right person for the job. The most visible revisionist activist in America should be a scholar and someone who is passionately interested in the literature.

I'm very far from being a scholar and I find the literature to be a real yawner. At the beginning of course it was awfully shocking to discover that it has not been demonstrated that the gas chamber stories are true. What I couldn't get out of my mind however was not the apparent fact that there had been no program for the mass gassing of Jews, thank God for that as they say, but how urgently intellectuals argue against intellectual freedom on this one issue.

Even in the early 1980s I had only a casual interest in the historical record. What held my attention was what I perceived to be the challenge of finding a way to convince the intellectuals, and the media intellectuals, that revisionist research should be judged on its merits, as I presumed they judged all other historical research. I see now I presumed much too much. These days, as students display a growing interest in an open debate about the Holocaust controversy, the intellectuals increasingly display signs of bad temper and even hysteria.



*Bradley R. Smith (18 Feb 1930- 18 Feb 2016)*

Professor Deborah Lipstadt, the leading voice representing the Holocaust industry in academia, has chosen to single out the work I do on college campuses for special attention in her much-praised book, *Denying the Holocaust, The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory*. There she devotes a 26-page chapter to what she sees as "The Battle for the Campus," writing plaintively that: "Colleagues have related that their students' questions are increasingly informed by Holocaust denial!"

*How do we know that there really were gas chambers? What proof do we have that the survivors are telling the truth? Are we going to hear the German side?*

Now there's a real scandal for you! Some students are no longer willing to accept on faith what their professors assure them is true about the gassing chambers, but want to learn what the evidence demonstrates. They suspect that while most survivors speak truthfully about their wartime experiences in the camps, some do not. Where do students get such ideas? There are even students who want to hear the "German" side to the Holocaust story. Unbelievable!

The Deborah Lipstadts of the world must be asking themselves what in hell is going on? They've run the Holocaust show on campus and in the media for so many years they see these signs of student curiosity and principle as the outbreak of some dreadful intellectual pox. I see them as the cure to one. The Lipstadts write about the "terrible harm" such questions can do. I ask why such questioning does not measure the good health of the culture?

Professor Lipstadt is no shrinking violet when it comes to arguing against intellectual freedom. She even has the brass to argue against "light of day," the concept that false statements and even false ideas can be exposed as such by flooding them with the light of free inquiry and open debate. She writes:

*[I]t is naive to believe that the 'light of day' can dispel lies, especially when they play on familiar stereotypes. Victims of racism, sexism, antisemitism, and a host of other prejudices know of light's limited ability to discredit falsehood.*

What does Lipstadt believe will dispel lies and discredit falsehood? Night? How many victims of racism, sexism and antisemitism speak against light in favor of suppression and censorship? I wonder how Jews felt about "light" in pre-war Nazi Germany? Early on the Nazis moved against Jews in the arts, against Jews in publishing, against Jews in the universities—all places where traditionally light is so highly valued. The Nazis had views about light in the 1930s that are similar to those of some professors today. Light for the Nazi-minded, darkness for everyone else. In the long run, light might not have made any difference for German Jews, but when you look at the record you find that when Hitler began to deny light to Jews, the Jews began to leave Germany. Those Jews understood the necessity of "light." Those who didn't soon found out what it meant to live in darkness. Without tyranny, human life is full of light.

The problem for the Lipstadts is that light is there for all of us without fear or favor. It is no respecter of persons. Just as the sun shines on the good and the bad alike, light refuses to choose sides. Historians who ask it to, betray their professional ideals and the ideal of light itself. It's Lipstadt's need for guarantees from light that causes her to argue against this great ideal of Western culture. We all have to be willing to accept what light illuminates. I admit on principle I might be wrong about the gas chambers, to say nothing about a lot of other stuff. Nevertheless, here I am, looking for ways to encourage intellectuals to encourage intellectual freedom with regard to the Holocaust controversy. I don't care anymore who's right or wrong about the gas chamber stories. I'm fishing a bigger lake.

My friend William called from Chicago to ask how the video project on Auschwitz is going. William is one of my volunteer advisors. I told him there had been too many production problems and I'd had to lay it aside. I said I was going to concentrate on finishing the book manuscript.

"Is that the manuscript you've been talking about the last two or three years?"

"Has it been that long?"

"This is bad news. This is really bad news."

"What are you suggesting?" I said. William is one of those very sincere men who wears his thoughts on his sleeve. You always know what he's suggesting.

"What I'm suggesting is you're very mistaken if you think people are interested in reading about your inner life as a Holocaust revisionist. Nobody wants to read about you, Bradley. Are you listening to me? Your personal life is a bore. People are interested in their own lives. The only interesting thing you've ever done is revisionism and you don't want to write about that. You want to write about your feelings. Can't you understand how childish that is? I have that first little book you published, what's it called? It's unreadable. Do you understand what I'm saying? It's a miracle you've been able to accomplish anything at all for revisionism."

"I understand what you're saying. But some people like the way I write. A writer can only have his own audience."

"I don't know who the hell you've been talking to. Listen to me. Let me tell you what your problem as a writer is. I'm telling you this as a friend. As someone who's interested in the work you're doing. Your problem is that you write like a sixty-year-old teenager."

"Sixty-four."

"What?"

"Sixty-four, William. I'm sixty-four now."

"Oh."

After a moment William said: "Is that a joke? I know how old you are. What the hell are we talking about here? Are we talking about something serious? I'm worried, Bradley. It's no joke that revisionism's got you for its point man."

When I found out that something was wrong with the gas chamber stories I was fifty years old. By the time you're fifty you've been around the block a few times. You've come to believe you're finished with fear, for example, yet here it was again. In a certain way, it was the fear that held my attention. I quickly lost interest in "survivor" yarns about gassing and torture and how good and innocent Jews are compared with Christians and everybody else.

Instead, I was intrigued and maybe a little obsessed with how afraid I was of admitting—of confessing I might even say—that I no longer believed. I had lived most of my adult life among Jews and with Jews, and some of us were terribly devoted to one another. When I realized I was going to go against the gas chamber stories, a terrible tumult entered my life because I understood many of my friends would feel I was going against them too. It was in that place that fear grasped me and held on.

I could have dropped the story and gone on my way, but when you write the way I write, the stories you dread most are the stories you are most obligated to pursue. My sense of things was that I had to risk friendships, even risk my family. I had to risk the contempt of my peers and the ostracism of a community and society, which would judge my doubting to be despicable. Nietzsche writes some place that we all work out of our weaknesses and I suppose that's what I did. In my anxiety and fear I decided to take on, not the gas-chamber story itself, but those who run the story as if it were their private franchise, who condemn those who question it. Those who have the power to destroy many of those they condemn.

The ruling discourse in America, and indeed the West, demands that the Holocaust story remain closed to authentic debate. The Holocaust happened. Revisionists say it didn't. For that reason all worthy persons and particularly intellectuals—who are all worthy persons by definition—favor the suppression and even censorship of revisionist theory. Meanwhile, because over the last half century the story has been revised so much, it becomes increasingly difficult to say exactly what the Holocaust was. That's where I saw my role. I fell into it like a blind man falling down a well. All I could see was the taboo that protected the story from real examination. How could anyone put his finger on what the thing itself had been if it was taboo to talk about it freely—really freely? I would be the one then, the blind man said, to help start the discussion going.

I didn't know how to get it going. Not knowing what to do, I did everything. One-on-one discussion, newsletters, radio talk shows, newspaper articles, television interviews, books, public speaking, print interviews, video tapes. You name it, I tried it. I became a one-man band. Dr. Franklin Littell, professor of religion at Temple University in Philadelphia and a Holocaust scholar himself, refers to me as a "malicious burst of energy" and compares me to "the adversary who wanders to and fro in the earth and goes up and down in it."

Friends tell me this is an insult. I think maybe it's something more subtle. I'm being compared to one of the great innovators in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Wanders to and fro in the earth and goes up and down in it? All right. Maybe I see what he's getting at. There's a whole world down there I didn't know existed. Dr. Littell's thoughtful observations on my character and movements illuminate the learning gap that exists between highly educated, professional Holocaust scholars on the one hand and ex-concrete contractors on the other.

When you express doubts which others believe are evil, and which in fact may cause many individuals to suffer and to feel diminished and perhaps even humiliated, you have an obligation to act out of a good conscience and to value what can be called right relationship. Which means I must be a good man or the mischief and grief I cause by saying I doubt what I doubt will be gratuitous. What does it mean to be a good man? I have only the foggiest notion. It would seem to me as a writer, however, that it would include being willing to say publicly I do not believe what I do not believe, particularly when what I no longer believe relieves another people, in this instance Germans, of the moral burden of a specifically horrendous crime I no longer believe they committed.

When my first essay advertisement, ["The Holocaust Story: How Much Is False? The Case for Open Debate,"](#) appeared as a full-page ad in the *Daily Northwestern*, an article responding to it appeared in the *Daily* written by Peter Hayes, an associate professor of history and German with a special interest in Nazi Germany. Titled "Some Plain Talk about the Holocaust and Revisionism," Hayes's article is a paint-

by-the-numbers example of how your typical Holocaust historian reacts when faced with even the simplest text challenging what he wants his students to believe.

I note his response here, not because it proved to be unique in any way, but because it was the first to reply directly to one of my ads, and because it proved to be a textbook guide to the subjective life of those academics who are willing to betray light.

*When this newspaper printed Bradley Smith's advertisement last Thursday it fanned not one, but two, gathering controversies on campus. The first concerns our knowledge about the Nazi massacre of the Jews of Europe. The second centers on the policies of the Daily itself.*

*Surprisingly perhaps, the first issue is far easier to clarify than the second. Of course, there's been no suppression of free inquiry into the Holocaust. It is precisely because of extensive and vigorous research by bona fide scholars over the past three decades that we know not only several of the facts that Smith manipulates in his ad, but also a good many that he does not want you to believe.*

*There's no point in writing more here about the factual deceptions and distortions in Smith's ad.*

[...]

No point in writing more about the factual deceptions in my ad? Which factual deceptions? For a moment I felt I must be blind to something your average Northwestern professor could see at a glance. Was there a misstatement of fact in my text or wasn't there? We all have our own way of looking at things, but this thing was not clear to me. How do you describe an intellectual environment in which an historian can write there is no point in writing more about factual deceptions in a specific text when, as a matter of fact, he hasn't written anything about them at all? However you do describe it, you should include the word vulgar.

Professor Hayes's article on my article continued for another seventeen paragraphs.

He avoided the temptation of attempting to reveal an error of fact in what I had written but charged me with "deception," "manipulation," "distortion," "ignorance," "nastiness," "dishonesty," "duplicity," "maliciousness," "tastelessness," "conspiracy mongering," "promoting implausibilities," "promoting anti-Semitism," "spreading disinformation" and the one I still like best, "brow beating academics." I would not have thought, considering the bold language the professor used, that he would have mentioned that last one.

Revisionist theory isn't wrong about everything, and there's the rub. Revisionism is simply a criticism of published academic writings on the Holocaust story. I take it as a given that revisionist research is wrong about a lot of things. The problem the professors face is that if they point out where revisionists are wrong, the professors are left with what's left over—with what revisionists are right about. This is a conceptual tragedy for your average academic. In each case where the revisionist is right, a bunch of academics are wrong and would have to fess up to being wrong, to having been wrong for a long time—and to having been stonewalling about being wrong. It would then become clear that while the good guys are right most of the time with what they publish on the story, the bad guys are right some of the time.

After the ad ran in the *Daily Targum* at Rutgers University, the *New York Times* ran an editorial on the controversy, as well as several news stories, letters to the editor, and a dumb opinion piece by two

Rutgers professors. It also assigned a reporter from its San Francisco bureau to drive down to Visalia with a cameraman to do a profile on me. I expected the worst but I liked the reporter, Catherine Bowen. She's a big hearty woman with a big hearty laugh. A photo ran with her story showing me gesticulating dramatically, giving the impression I actually believed what I was saying. Bowen informed me she is a specialist on the White separatist movement in the Northwest. She said she'd interviewed all those guys, in prison and out. She said every racist and anti-Semite in the Northwest knows who I am and all about the work I do.

"Is that right?" I said.

"Do you keep up with the people in the movement?"

I understand she's fishing, but then, I'm here to be caught. I tell her a lot of those people contacted me when I first started doing revisionism but over the years they'd all dropped me. "I'm not anti-Jewish, so that was a big strike against me. My family is Mexican, so the racials see me as a race traitor, and I don't have any guns so the militias and the anti-ZOG forces are convinced I have no sense of honor."

"Three strikes and you're out," Bowen says laughing:

"I suppose so. I think the movement people think I'm a pantywaist."

"That's exactly what they think," Bowen says laughing heartily. "They think you're a pantywaist."

Her photographer thinks my being a pantywaist is funny too but it's Bowen's laugh that rings in my ears. Maybe it's because she's a lady. You can laugh at being called a pantywaist when a man says it because you have a choice what to do about it, but when a lady laughs about something like that you're kind of helpless. So I remain quiet. I'm a good sport about it. When the movement people read this they'll say, "Of course Smith's a good sport. Smith has no sense of honor."

When William Blake writes that Jesus acted on impulse, not from thought, he means that Jesus's actions did not depend on his being obsequious before the ruling discourse of his day. Of course in Blake's view Jesus was good all the way through so his impulses were good so his acts were good. It pleases me to think that Jesus acted on impulse and not by the rules, because I think when push comes to shove that's what I do and that throws me in with good company. How good I am is another question. It's not one I can pass judgment on. Actually I think I'm a pretty swell guy. One irony here about impulse is that the professors can be seen to be acting on it too. They dismiss revisionist theory with a wave of the hand, holding that there can be no debate about the gas chambers because there can be no "other side" to the story. Only their side. Maybe it was something like this 200 years ago that drove Blake to conclude that education is the work of Satan.

It's simply a core belief among our intellectual classes that the Germans killed millions of Jews and others in gassing installations. Entire classes of intellectuals have become True Believers. I understand it can be argued that I'm a true believer too—in intellectual freedom. I can't prove that intellectual freedom is better than tyranny. It's something I want. That's the long and short of it. I doubt many things that others believe. No one can keep me from doubting, but I crave the freedom to be allowed to express my doubts to others.

This isn't an argument over natural rights. I don't want to make intellectual freedom a plank in a party line. Intellectual freedom is not primarily a political issue or even an intellectual one. It's a spiritual issue.

You either desire it or you don't. You either want it for others as well as for yourself or you don't really want it. They say Buddha said that desire is at the root of all pain. I'm willing to go with the pain. My desire is the foundation of whatever arguments I make to convince others that intellectual freedom is better than tyranny. First the wanting, then the argument. The other way around and it's mere thinking.

One day I ran across an article about mad poets in the *New York Review of Books*. Not poets who are annoyed. Crazy ones. I have some interest in poetry, and an intermittent interest in madness. Professor Charles Rosen of the University of Chicago wrote the article. Early this year I submitted a second full-page advertisement to a student newspaper on that campus, *The Chicago Maroon*. You can see the coincidences gathering themselves together here. This ad was titled "The Holocaust Controversy: The Case for Open Debate." In the end it was suppressed so Chicago students didn't get to read it, but the word had gotten out on campus about the text of the ad and there was a big stink about it.

So one afternoon I was in the mall here drinking a diet Pepsi and reading Professor Rosen's discussion of madness in English and Continental poets from about 1750 to 1850. It looked as if half my favorite poets from the period were goofy. At the same time, Rosen noted that madness is oftentimes a matter of social convention and that social pressure oftentimes determines whether or not you will be certified as a lunatic. It is not clear, he writes, that those men with their visions were any more insane than the people today "who believe that no one was gassed at Auschwitz."

What was this? Was Professor Rosen talking about me? It's come to the place where professors can't make mention of Mayan *cenotes*, bureaucracy during the Sung dynasty or a lunatic English poet without introducing some fatuous reference to Auschwitz. I read someplace fifteen years ago that there were already 200,000 bibliographical references to Auschwitz, and that was before the professors really got cooking. I suppose Auschwitz will start popping up in new editions of Grimm's collected tales for first readers.

Despite the obstacles and the longing for night so prevalent in the universities with regard to Holocaust studies, I've been able to create a tremendous free-press scandal throughout the academic community. My ads call attention to revisionist theory on one campus after another across the nation. My second article, "The Holocaust Controversy: The Case for Open Debate," has run as a full-page ad at Michigan, Duke, Cornell, Rutgers, Ohio State, Georgia, Vanderbilt, Louisiana State, Howard, Arizona, Montana and at half a dozen others. Howard is the largest Black university in the country. When the ad ran at the University of San Diego, the president of that Catholic institution ordered special agents to fan out over the campus and confiscate every copy of the paper still available and destroy it. Prospective entries for a new Catholic Index perhaps?

When the *New York Times* ran its snooty editorial on my ad, asserting it was trashy and barren of ideas, it nevertheless affirmed, "When there is free expression, even the ugliest ideas enrich democracy." How do ugly ideas enrich democracy? Professor Lipstadt found the answer at *The Harvard Crimson* and took the trouble to repeat it in her *Denying the Holocaust*.

In one of the most unequivocal evaluations of [Smith's] ad, *The Crimson* declared it ". . . utter bullshit that has been discredited time and time again."

So there we have it—light on the one hand and bullshit on the other. The yin and yang of intellectual freedom. What browbeaten professors and far-too-elegant editorial writers at *The New York Times* find

ugly is actually part of the process of fertilization when open debate is allowed. Of course, everything new and daring looks bullshit-ugly to those who have something to lose from the new and the daring. When you live in a farming community like ours, you learn to appreciate the necessity for light and fertilizer both. Together they're what make the grapes grow. They make the white blossoms appear on the fruit trees.

Yousof, another of my volunteer advisors, says serious people don't take me seriously because my writing reveals my lack of a university education.

"You missed something by not going to school," he says. "It shows in everything you write. Your thinking is disorderly and incomplete. How can anyone who is well-read take you seriously? You don't understand the logic of language. You have no formal intellectual training. Educated people understand that when they read you. When you write about the Holocaust from an intellectual perspective they know you're in over your head."

It's obvious to me Yousof has his finger on something. There's plenty missing here. More than he suspects maybe. But this is the hand I was dealt. We can't all be scholars. Most of us aren't. Many of us never went to school at all. When my father-in-law finished the first grade in a Mexico City grammar school, that was it for him. He had to get a job. Nevertheless, ordinary people everywhere feel committed, in the context of their own lives, to right action and right relationship. These are no more and no less than the first responsibilities intellectuals bear, in the context of their lives. I have found everywhere that ordinary people sense it is good to be truthful, generous and open-minded and that it's base to be deceitful, uncharitable and bigoted. With respect to the Holocaust controversy, I don't know of a single intellectual elite that has not betrayed those simple standards.

Occasionally one of my revisionist colleagues will speak to me of honor and urge me not to allow my enemies to insult and ridicule me without striking back. Honorable men feel it's degrading to be ridiculed and insulted. I've come to see something of the comic in it. That's how low I've sunk. When I was a kid it made me angry to be insulted or treated contemptuously, but the older I grow the more difficult it is for me to feel offended by anything said by anyone. One of my problems is that I don't have enemies. Many people think of me as their enemy but I see those persons as potential friends with whom I disagree on a few matters. Maybe if I had been to university I'd be able to relate to them in a more mature way.

Ramana Maharshi advises going at this matter very differently, but he's a Hindu so you have to cut him some slack. He says he doesn't care why an insult hurts, he wants to know who it is who believes he is being hurt. It doesn't do to tell the Maharshi it's you because the Maharshi will ask you who you are and you won't be able to tell him—not to his satisfaction anyhow—and after a while not to yours either. That's the theory. I think there's something to it.

I can still see (who am I?) the television images of the monks in Saigon sitting on the sidewalk setting fire to themselves. They weren't laughing or cracking jokes but they weren't complaining either. They were protesting what they held to be unacceptable behavior by those who had chosen to rule them. I detest complaint but I admire protest. One of the many reasons Adolf puts me off so is that he was a truly chronic complainer (many "survivors" resemble him in that way). I don't think he ever would have been a happy camper, but if he'd chatted up the Maharshi every now and then (their lives spanned the same decades) maybe his own life and the lives of everyone in Europe would have taken a different turn.



Debbie M. Price, a good-looking syndicated columnist writing for the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, begins one of her columns:

*From California it came, a voice of pure evil, whispering gently, persuasively into the phone . . . on the very day President Clinton dedicated the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, here was this voice, this man, Bradley Smith. . . .*

Now that's a terrific lead. Her prose goes downhill after that opening paragraph, but I have a soft spot in my heart for anyone who'll kick off a column the way Debbie kicked that one off. I've gotten clippings of it from newspapers all over the country. A voice of pure evil. That's something. Secular journalists are joining Christian scholars to elevate me to extravagant heights of influence. Still, it makes sense. When you find yourself identified with the One who wanders to and fro inside the earth and goes up and down in it, a voice of pure evil comes with the territory. What I need to know is, when I come up to the surface to chat with Texas journalists, where is my point of entry? If the time ever comes when I have to make a run for it, I'd like to know where the devil the hole is.

It's six o'clock in the afternoon on the last Sunday in May. A surprise storm has covered the valley with dark heavy clouds. I'm in the patio behind the house checking the air in the tires on Marisol's bicycle. The front one is low. I hear thunder, a sudden wind blows through the plum trees, then the first drops of rain fall heavily on the patio roof. Fat water drops splatter the concrete walk that leads around the side of the house. I sit on the saddle of the metallic-red girl's bike and watch the rain shake the plumtree leaves and listen to it fall on the corrugated plastic above me. When it stops I pedal over to Mooney Boulevard to the gas station where I use the air.

I wait out another squall beside the pumps, then start pedaling toward downtown-toward the Main Street Diner and Bar. I might make it before it rains again, I might not. Since coming to Visalia I've been drinking Bass Ale but the last time out after I drank a few Bases and left the Diner and was pedaling back along Locust—I don't know how it happened—I fell off the bike into the gutter in front of the Tulare County Escrow Office. From now on when I'm riding the bicycle, no more Bass Ale. Today I'll drink something lighter. Maybe a few Becks Clear. Nearing downtown I cut across Noble and coast over the Locust street bridge across the sunken freeway. I look east up the freeway past where the concrete goes out of sight and beyond to the mountains and there, where the clouds have blown apart, I can see the first ranges of the Sierra Nevada beneath a pure blue sky and how their crests are covered with a fresh white snowfall. And then out of the blue as they say, I hear a voice speak.

"The time is come for you to live a life of intellectual freedom, not argue for one."

I don't understand very well what the voice is getting at. But I'll think about it.

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